DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 127 UD 032 556

AUTHOR	Barthauer, Linda; Halfon, Neal
TITLE	Supporting Children and Families: Communities, Schools, Employers Play Key Roles. Growing Up Well. Focus on Prevention.
INSTITUTION	California Center for Health Improvement, Sacramento.
SPONS AGENCY	California Wellness Foundation.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	6p.; For the entire 8-part series, see UD 032 549-556.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Welfare; *Children; Community Involvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Employee Assistance Programs; Employers; Parent Education; *Parents; Policy Formation; *Public Opinion; Public Policy; *School Role; *Social Support Groups; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*California

ABSTRACT

This report, eighth and last in a series, discusses the important role community groups and leaders, schools, and employers play in providing children and parents support and encouragement. It reports the opinions of California adults, expressed in a survey conducted by the California Center for Health Improvement (CCHI), about a variety of issues related to the health and well-being of children. Survey response show that Californians do turn to others for help in parenting, usually looking to another relative or a spouse. Teachers and extended family were seen as most helpful and involved, but surveyed parents said that local businesses, community groups, coaches, and recreation instructors play a greater role in children's lives than in the past. Schools are an important place for parents to seek guidance and support, but research has suggested that many parents are intimidated in turning to the schools. The CCHI survey asked California parents about three policies employers could adopt to help employees: (1) flex time to allow employees to structure the work day in ways that help their families; (2) employer payment for health coverage for the dependents of employees; and (3) programs to assist employees with legal or financial matters or to provide support in addressing family problems. Surveyed parents supported all these options, with employee assistance programs arousing the least interest of the 3 suggestions, at 55%. A number of California businesses are instituting employee benefits of this sort. Policy recommendations to support families and promote the involvement of caring adults in the lives of children are made for communities, schools, and employers. (Contains three tables and nine references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 426 127

Supporting Children and Families: Communities, Schools, Employers Play Key Roles.

Growing Up Well
Focus on Prevention

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Pamela Jones
CCHI

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UD032 556

Supporting Children and Families: Communities, Schools, Employers Play Key Roles

By Linda Barthauer, M.D. and Neal Halfon, M.D., M.P.H.

Raising children is an important responsibility. When children are very young, their cognitive, social and psychological development need attention and encouragement. As children get older, they need support in negotiating their path to adulthood. Parents and other caring adults within communities each play important roles to assure healthy development of children in the early years and into adulthood. A 1997 national survey by the research group Public Agenda reveals the importance of community support in raising children. Eighty-one percent of Americans said they believed it is harder to be a parent today than in past years. In the same study, 63 percent agreed that most parents face times when they really need help raising children (1).

The California Center for Health Improvement's (CCHI) *Children and Youth Survey* asked California adults and parents to provide their opinions about a variety of issues affecting the health and well-being of children and young people.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

There is broad agreement that most parents face times when they need help raising their children. California parents say they turn to a variety of people within their communities — extended family, their spouses, friends and neighbors, doctors and other healthcare providers, and teachers and other caregivers. At the same time, as children develop and mature they need support and guidance from their parents and from other caring adults in their schools and communities. This eighth and final report in the *Growing Up Well* series discusses the important role community groups and leaders, schools and employers play in providing children and parents support and encouragement. It also offers a range of approaches each can take to support and strengthen families and invest in the common good of California.

TABLE 1

Experience, Research Reveal Important Lessons for Promoting Child and Family Health

- **Start Early.** Program experience and research reveal strategic early investments make a difference in promoting the health of children and young people and that prevention is key.
- **Caring Adults Needed.** Program experience and research also show children and young people need caring adults — their parents as well as adults in their extended families, schools and communities — to help them grow up well.
- **Coordinate and Integrate.** Services for children and families such as healthcare, education, child welfare and child care, among others, need to become a part of broader systems supporting children and families. Coordination and integration of programs and services at the state and local levels are no longer simply called for, they are required.
- **Inaction Is Costly.** A failure to act will result in continued reliance on expensive, remedial responses and lost opportunities for children, families and communities.

Californians responded with high levels of concern for children and a willingness to invest in their future. Importantly, the views of Californians coincide with lessons learned from research and from programs that serve children and families. Starting early with children matters, and focusing on prevention works. Caring adults within immediate and extended families and from the broader community are essential. Programs for children and families need to be organized into more rational, coordinated systems. Inaction — the failure to make program and policy changes on behalf of children and families — is costly and results in lost opportunities for children to reach their full potential in school and society (table 1).

A Role for Communities

The communities in which families live are critical in providing children and families support and encouragement. Institutions, organizations and individuals of all ages and backgrounds can provide a strong base from which parents and children receive guidance. In recent years, moreover, there has been growing

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

recognition that community-based efforts to help families can be very effective by integrating services already available within the community. Successful efforts to coordinate new and existing family services have been based both in schools and in the larger community.

Most parents turn to others for assistance in raising their children. CCHI's *Children and Youth Survey* asked California parents where they turn when they need help in parenting. Most parents said they look to another relative or spouse. Yet, more than half also said they turn to friends or neighbors; nearly half turn to doctors and other health professionals; and 40 percent turn to teachers or other caregivers (table 2). In addition, there is broad agreement among parents surveyed that community organizations and institutions play a greater role today in helping children grow up healthy than when parents were children themselves. While teachers and extended family are seen as most involved, parents surveyed said local businesses, community groups, and coaches and recreation instructors play substantially greater roles today (2).

Increasingly, community-based organizations are bringing community resources to a convenient location, such as a family resource center (FRC) which provides parents and their children support. Services can range from family health care to parent training to community policing programs. The Native American Parental Assistance Program (NAPAP) in San Jacinto, California, is an example of such a program. Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, NAPAP is run by Ahmium Education, Inc., a non-profit organization that works in collaboration with state and local agencies that serve Native American families. The program assists parents to become active in their community and in their children's learning. Central to NAPAP activities is the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, in which certified parent educators make monthly home visits, conduct developmental assessments and help parents develop skills to encourage their children's learning. Other services include parent workshops and mentoring and intergenerational programs.

TABLE 2

Many Others Help California Parents Raise Their Children

When things become difficult for you in caring for or raising your child(ren), where do you go for help?

	YES
RELATIVE OTHER THAN SPOUSE	74%
YOUR SPOUSE	73%
FRIEND OR NEIGHBOR	55%
DOCTOR, NURSE OR OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONAL	48%
YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER OR CAREGIVER	40%
PRIEST, RABBI OR OTHER MEMBER OF THE CLERGY	31%
COUNSELOR OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL	26%
SELF-HELP SUPPORT GROUP	16%

Source: *Children and Youth Survey*, The Field Institute, October – November 1997.

A Role for Schools

Schools are an important place for parents to seek guidance and support, both from educators and other parents. Yet, studies have shown that while many parents want to become more involved in their children's schools, they may feel intimidated in doing so (3). Additionally, lack of outreach may hamper parental involvement. Yet, when schools do reach out to parents, they can be quite successful in assisting parents help their children attain educational goals and build stronger families.

School-based initiatives to promote educational attainment and support families are numerous. California's Healthy Start program, which links schools with community and other governmental resources, is one of the most well-known of recent efforts. Another is Communities in Schools (CIS), which brings together a variety of community services into a coordinated, school-based effort. An evaluation of CIS found that the at-risk students served by the program missed school less often and performed better in class (4).

In addition, programs targeting the preschool level have been found to have lasting results. For example, the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan provided part-time preschool and home visits to 123 disadvantaged children in the mid-1960s. Children were followed until age 27. An analysis by RAND estimates that the program saved the government approximately $13,000 per child because less was spent on other services, such as special education, income support and criminal justice as children grew into adulthood (5).

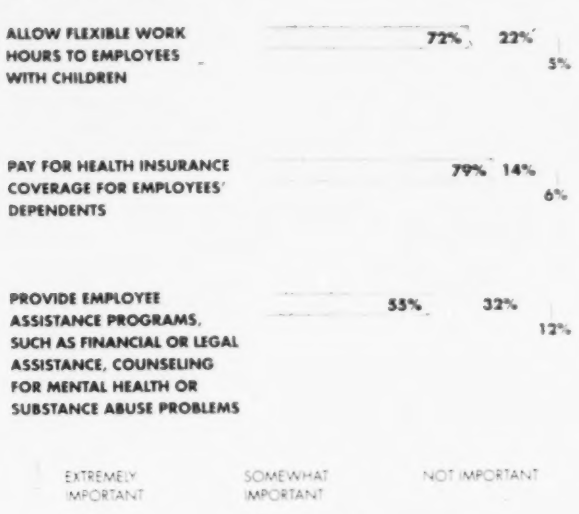
A Role for Employers

Approximately 60 percent of mothers in the United States with children under six years of age are working outside of the home, and more than three-quarters of mothers with school-age children are in the workforce. In light of this important shift in the workforce, businesses are being called upon to consider family needs in new ways. Response, however, has been slow for many businesses. Parents continue to experience considerable stress as they try to meet the dual demands of family and work

TABLE 3

California Parents Support Three Employer Policies to Support Families

Things that businesses and employers could do for their employees and the community. How important do you think it is for businesses and employers to do this?



Source: *Children and Youth Survey*, The Field Institute, October – November 1997.

each day (6). Moreover, while some companies have family policies on paper, either they don't exist in practice or parents feel insecure about using them (6, 7).

CCHI's *Children and Youth Survey* asked California parents about three policies businesses could adopt to help employees and their community. One policy is flexible work hours, known as "flextime," which allows employees to structure their schedules in a way which best serves their families. Flextime is an option for 29 percent of employees in the United States (8). Nearly three-quarters of parents surveyed, 72 percent, said it is *extremely important* for employers to allow flexible working hours for employees with children (table 3).

A second policy is employer payment for health coverage for the dependents of employees. Nearly four-fifths of parents surveyed, 79 percent, said it is *extremely important* for employers to pay for health insurance for dependents. In light of California's high percentage of uninsured — the overwhelming majority of whom are either workers or dependents of workers — this response is understandable. Finally, parents were asked about the importance of employers offering programs to assist employees with financial or legal matters, or provide support in addressing family problems, such as mental illness or substance use. More than half of parents surveyed, 55 percent, said it is *extremely important* for employers to provide this type of assistance (table 3).

Many businesses are taking steps to meet the needs of families, and many businesses instituting "family friendly" policies have found their efforts are cost-effective as employees become more productive and turnover decreases. A 1995 survey of 14 companies with family friendly reputations found that these businesses use telecommuting, job sharing, built-in "floater" staff to meet emergency needs, flexibility in hours and work arrangements, and special family services to maintain employment and productivity (9).

A number of California companies are creating a supportive work environment for families. For example, Patagonia, a supplier of outdoor wear and equipment, lists family concerns as a high priority. Through its Work-Family Program, the company provides employees an on-site day care center which children may attend from infancy to kindergarten. There is also an after-school program for children up to age eleven. The company provides two months paid parental leave for mothers and fathers, job-sharing, telecommuting, flextime and compressed work weeks, while covering the full cost of health insurance. The company identifies a financial payoff for these efforts. In 1995–96, Patagonia estimated that it saved $133,110 more than the company's total subsidy of

Neighborhoods Partner for Community Health

Four neighborhoods in West Contra Costa County, California — Iron Triangle, North Richmond, Parchester Village and West San Pablo — face the highest levels of unemployment and poverty in the county. Partners for Health, a 24-member community coalition, is implementing a community-defined, multi-cultural plan focused on breaking the cycle of unemployment which has affected these neighborhoods by improving job readiness, providing education that prepares children for the future, reducing teen pregnancy and promoting neighborhood safety. Neighborhood Service Centers provide a range of support services, including education and employment services, designed to help residents obtain jobs which provide living wages.

Community residents play an integral role as members of Partners for Health. Two residents from each of the four neighborhoods, along with representatives from 13 organizations in the community, including healthcare and educational institutions, governmental agencies and local businesses, participate as coalition members. By promoting employment and neighborhood economic stability, Partners seeks to enhance individual, family and community strengths, increase community control, and promote community safety and well-being.

Partners for Health is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation as part of its Health Improvement Initiative. For more information, contact 510 374.3593.

$541,211 for the Work-Family program in employee retention, increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, tax deductions and a low turnover rate.

Similarly, Amgen, based in Thousand Oaks, California, offers employees with children on-site day care, provides employee access to a fitness center, and sponsors an annual Teacher Excellence Award, which honors five educators in areas in which the company has operations. Xerox Corporation of Palo Alto, California, supports families by offering financial support for dependent care, adoption assistance, a child care resource and referral service, lunchtime talks about parenting issues, a family resource center offering employee counseling, and elder care consultation and referral.

Policy Recommendations

The lessons learned from research and program experience point the direction for supporting children and families. Start early with support to build child and family strengths and capacities. Promote the involvement of caring adults in the lives of children from their early years into adulthood. Coordinate and integrate child and family programs and services to develop systems of support. Encourage community action on behalf of children and families as an investment in the community's future.

Keeping these lessons in mind, communities, schools and employers all can do a great deal to support parents and families, including:

Communities

- Encouraging development of partnerships between community, educational and business establishments to provide parent and family support programs and coordinate services for families.
- Recognizing and rewarding the contributions by businesses and other organizations to support families.
- Expanding community-based initiatives such as mentoring and youth development programs. Some of these activities can include individuals and groups previously uninvolved with children and young people, such as single and retired persons.

Schools

- Providing opportunities for parents to become involved in students' education and encouraging family participation in children's intellectual development.
- Joining with other community groups and businesses to provide school-based and school-linked activities and services for children and families.

Employers

- Adopting "family-friendly" practices, such as job sharing, flex-time, increased family leave time, child care arrangements or credits and employee assistance programs.
- Providing employer-sponsored health insurance coverage for employees and their dependents.

References

1. Public Agenda. *Kids' Time Ditty: What Americans Really Think About The Next Generation*. New York, New York. 1997.
2. California Center for Health Improvement. *Children and Youth Survey*. Sacramento, California. The Field Institute surveyed 1,168 California adults between October 8 and November 8, 1997. Of adults surveyed, 698 were parents and 854 were registered voters. Survey results from the adult sample are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval. The parent sampling error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points, and the registered voter sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points, both at the 95 percent confidence interval.
3. DeMoss, S.E., Vaughn, C., Langenbach, M. "Parental Perceptions of Long-term Involvement With Their Children's Schooling." *National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) Bulletin* 80: (1996):92.
4. American Youth Policy Forum. *Some Things That Make a Difference for Youth*. Washington, D.C., 1997.
5. Karoly, L., Greenwood, P.W., Everingham, S.M.S., Houbé, J., Kilburn, M.R., Rydell, C.P., Sanders, M.R., Chiesa, J.R. *Investing in Our Children: What we Know and Don't Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions*. RAND: Santa Monica, California, 1998.
6. Public Policy Institute. *New Economic Equation*. Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996.
7. Friedman, D. "Corporate Responses to Family Needs." *Marriage and Family Review* 15 (1990): 99–99.
8. Strong Families Strong Schools. *Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. Obtained on-line 7.15.98 at http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong.tib.html.
9. Fram, E.H., Miller, E.L. "Families at Work: A Matter of Priorities. How Small Business Can Help Employees with Family Problems." *USA Today Magazine* 123 (1995): 28–31.

The California Center for Health Improvement (CCHI) is a non-profit, non-partisan health policy and education center.

1321 Garden Highway, Suite 210, Sacramento, CA 95833-9754
Phone: 916.646.2149 • Fax: 916.646.2151
E-mail: policymatters@cchi.org • http://www.policymatters.org

Karen A. Bodenhorn, R.N., M.P.H.
President & CEO

Lee D. Kemper, M.P.A.
Director of Policy

The UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities' mission is to improve society's ability to provide children with the best opportunities for health and well-being, and the chance to assume productive roles within familes and communities.

10833 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1772
Phone: 310.206.1898 • Fax: 310.825.3868
E-mail: childctr@ucla.edu

Neal Halfon, M.D., M.P.H.
Professor & Co-Director

Linda Barthauer, M.D.
Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar

This publication is funded by a grant to CCHI from The California Wellness Foundation as part of its Health Improvement Initiative.